

# **Direct From the Field:**

## **A Guide to Bullying Prevention**

Bullying is not an inevitability of youth. This new guide provides educators with information about prevention and information strategies that can help them effectively respond to bullying and, importantly, can help to create a climate where the entire school community is engaged in bullying prevention.

In the first chapter the reader will find information that can help define bullying and its many forms. Chapter 2 begins to introduce some of what is known about preventing bullying and in chapter 3 classroom teachers can find tools they can use with students. In chapter 4, school personnel are offered information about intervening in incidents where bullying has already occurred. Chapter 5 offers specific strategies that students and young people can use to address bullying.

Bullying is the aggressive, unjust use of force by a more powerful person or group toward a less powerful person or group. Often this physical, psychological or emotional aggression is repetitive behavior done with the desire to hurt the victim and exploit the power imbalance.

**In the 2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (MYRBS), roughly one in four students (24%) reported being bullied at school in the past year.** Being bullied included being repeatedly teased, threatened, hit, kicked, shunned or excluded by another student or group of students. **22% of males and 26% of female high school students reported being bullied in the 12 months before the survey.** The MYRBS also found that students receiving special education services were significantly more likely to have been bullied (38% vs. 22%). They were also more likely to have skipped school because they felt unsafe (8% vs. 4%). (2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey)

In one national, on-line survey the reason most frequently reported by victims of bullying for being harassed was the student's appearance. **4 in 10 teens reported that students are frequently harassed for the way they look and their body size.** The next most cited reason for frequent harassment was sexual orientation. One third of teens reported that they are frequently harassed because they are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. **Over a third of students experienced physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and more than a quarter on the basis of their gender expression.** (GLSEN, 2005 National On-line Survey "From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America – A National Report on School Bullying")

These statistics are mirrored in Massachusetts. **Students who either identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual or reported any same sex sexual contact, were significantly more likely than other students been bullied (44% vs. 23%). They were also more likely than other students to have skipped school because they felt unsafe (13% vs. 3%).** (2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey)

***Bullying has profound health and well-being consequences for young people.***

**Kids who are bullied are 5 times more likely to become depressed.**

(Bullying Prevention Is Crime Prevention, A Report by Fight Crime; Invest in Kids, 2003).

**Students who were bullied at school once or more in the past year were more likely than their peers who were not bullied to have considered or attempted suicide** (24% vs. 9% and 12% vs. 5% respectively) (2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

**There are significant associations between violence related behaviors and experiences and academic achievement.** Students who experienced violence were less likely to succeed academically. (2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey)

There are also implications for the bullies themselves. **Nearly 60% of those who researchers classified as bullies in grade 6-9 were convicted of at least one crime by age 24; 40% of them had 3 or more convictions by age 24.** Bullying is an early warning sign of anti-social behavior that is not limited to school settings, but continues in other settings and into adulthood. (Bullying Prevention Is Crime Prevention, A Report by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2003)

### ***What's effective and what's not in Bullying Prevention and Intervention?***

EFFECTIVE	NOT EFFECTIVE
<b>1. School-wide initiatives that make the entire school safe.</b> (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program)	<b>1. Peer mediation approaches between victims of bullying and the bullies are inappropriate.</b> Bullying involves powerful youth harassing less powerful youth. Mediation assumes a level of power equality and too narrowly puts the responsibility on the victim and the bully. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids)
<b>2. Educating all staff (including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, teachers, administrators and school nurses) and parents on bullying prevention.</b> (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids)	<b>2. Zero Tolerance Policies</b> The punitive use of suspensions is not effective without the full comprehension of the bully on how their behavior needs to be and can be changed. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids)
<b>3. Provide adequate adult supervision</b> in outdoor areas, hallways, and other areas where bullying is likely to take place. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids)	<b>3. Simply advising victims of bullying to “stand” up or confront the bullies.</b> Such advice is dangerous and unproductive. The school is responsible for ensuring the safety of students and youth need the support of the adults. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids)
<b>4. Educate staff on how to intervene quickly and decidedly in bullying situations.</b> (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program)	<b>4. Ignoring verbal or physical harassment in hopes that it will resolve itself.</b> Staff inaction allows circumstances to escalate and sends a signal to everyone witnessing the harassment that the staff condones the behavior. Students are also less likely to trust the staff's power or competency to address incidents of bullying.

### ***Bullying is preventable!***

Every young person deserves the right to feel safe in their community and their school. It is important that schools/communities are pro-active in creating and maintaining safety for all youth. For more information on creating more safety in your school or community, a list of additional resources was compiled with useful lesson plans, curricula, and other ideas to address bullying and harassment in your community.